



Mount Olive Devotions by Pastor Glenn Monson

The 13th Week After Pentecost (September 5 – 9, 2022)

Monday

Psalm 15

¹ O LORD, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? ² Those who walk blamelessly and do what is right and speak the truth from their heart; ³ who do not slander with their tongue and do no evil to their friends nor heap shame upon their neighbors; ⁴ in whose eyes the wicked are despised but who honor those who fear the LORD; who stand by their oath even to their hurt; ⁵ who do not lend money at interest and do not take a bribe against the innocent.

Those who do these things shall never be moved.

Scholars believe that Psalm 15 was conceived of as a liturgy. The first verse was what the priest said to the people: “O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?” This referred to the temple in Jerusalem, and simply asked what was required for a person to enter the temple for worship. The people provided the reply: “Those who walk blamelessly and do what is right!” The priest then might have asked again, “O Lord, who may abide in your tent and dwell on your holy hill?” And again the people reply: “Those who speak truth from their heart.” And so it would go through the whole psalm. What is noteworthy is that entrance to the temple is not based upon right sacrifices or right piety or belief, but on how one treats the neighbor. To live in solidarity with others, to refuse to take advantage of the weak or vulnerable, and to stand by your word even when it hurts, these are the things that please God. This is what we are still called to as God’s people.

Prayer

Thank you, Holy God, for your people down through the ages who have been our teachers, the ones who have shown us the way of righteousness. Help us to live in ways that honor you and bring blessing to others. Grant us strength to live as people of integrity and compassion, knowing that all that we have is from your hand. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

Tuesday

Genesis 12:10-20

¹⁰ Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to reside there as an alien, for the famine was severe in the land. ¹¹ When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know well that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, ¹² and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife’; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³ Say you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you and that my life may be spared on your account.”

¹⁴ When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. ¹⁵ When the officials of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house. ¹⁶ And for her sake he dealt well with Abram, and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male

and female slaves, female donkeys, and camels.

¹⁷ But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. ¹⁸ So Pharaoh called Abram and said, "What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?" ¹⁹ Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her, and be gone." ²⁰ And Pharaoh gave his men orders concerning him, and they set him on the way with his wife and all that he had.

This peculiar story shows the humanity of one of the patriarchs of the Old Testament, Abram. Even though we know him as a man of great faith, who on another occasion will be willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac, on an altar before God, on this occasion his fears get the best of him. He decides that telling a little "white lie" might be the best way to go. As we see, this little lie sets all sorts of things in motion that could have been avoided if he had been straightforward. This story is a good reminder to us whenever we are tempted to "massage the truth" a bit in order to protect our own interests. Lies always have a way of coming home to roost, and the more we tell, the more difficult it becomes to disentangle ourselves from the web we have spun. Better simply to be straightforward and let the chips fall where they may. After all, faith, as Abram will eventually demonstrate, is all about trusting that God will provide for and protect us all our days, come what may.

Prayer

Grant us faith, O God. Keep our fears from overwhelming us. Remind us that your will is always that we may have life and have it to the full. Lead us in the way of truth and peace all our days, we pray. In the name of Christ. AMEN.

Wednesday

Ephesians 3:14-21

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

This powerful prayer is one that we could pray for one another every day. Look at what is being asked for: to be strengthened in the inner being, that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith, that we may have the power to comprehend and know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. And why are these things being requested? So that we may be filled with all the fullness of God! Wow! Now there is a prayer worth praying. Notice that everything being prayed for here is in the

innermost heart and mind of a person. What is being asked for is nothing less than a resilient faith that has the power to sustain us throughout all the tests and trials of this life. Do you know someone who is struggling with chronic pain or a terminal illness? Do you know someone whose work is difficult to the point of exhaustion? Do you know someone who is discouraged or disheartened because of events beyond their control? Perhaps this prayer might be the very thing you could be praying for them, and sending them a note, reminding them of your concern, might not hurt either. As Paul says here, that small act of concern could well have “the power to accomplish abundantly far more than you can ask or imagine.”

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the strength you give us every day. Thank you for your Holy Spirit that inspires us and gives us faith. Thank you for your dear Son, Jesus, whose sacrifice sets us free from sin and death and gives us hope for this life and the next. Keep us always in the faith, we pray. In the name of Jesus. AMEN.

Thursday

Luke 8:4-8, 11-15

⁴When a large crowd was gathering, as people were coming to [Jesus] from town after town, he said in a parable: ⁵“A sower went out to sow his seed, and as he sowed some fell on a path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. ⁶Some fell on rock, and as it grew up it withered for lack of moisture. ⁷Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. ⁸Some fell into good soil, and when it grew it produced a hundredfold.” As he said this, he called out, “If you have ears to hear, then hear!” ¹¹“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. ¹²The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away. ¹⁴As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. ¹⁵But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bear fruit with endurance.

In our Lutheran baptismal liturgy we do something that is quite unique to us as people of God: we renounce three powers: “The devil and all the forces that defy God,” “the powers of this world that rebel against God,” and “the ways of sin that draw [us] from God.” These three powers are the very things that Jesus points to in this parable that can cause God’s word to die in our hearts. First, there is the devil that comes and takes the Word away. Second, there are the ways of sin - what we call “the flesh” - that fails in the time of testing. Finally, there are the powers of this world with all their allures of riches and pleasure that choke off the Word. Jesus knew full well what he was talking about when he warned his disciples about the need to hold fast to the Word. He also knew that when the Word falls into good soil it produces abundant fruit. Oh, that we *all* might be such soil!

Prayer

Gracious God, create in us a welcome place for your word. We know that we are so easily distracted by the things of this world, so busy with so many things, and so prone to forget what you have taught us, that we easily fall away. Forgive us, Lord, and work in us that faith that will bear fruit in the world. In the name of Christ, we pray. AMEN.

Friday

Exodus 18:13, 17-24

¹³The next day Moses sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around him from morning until evening. ¹⁷Moses's father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. ¹⁸You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. ¹⁹Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God and bring their cases to God. ²⁰Teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do. ²¹You should also look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. ²²Let them sit as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every important case to you but decide every minor case themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. ²³If you do this and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their homes in peace." ²⁴So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said.

This is a story of wise delegation. Moses, the leader of the Israelites, has somehow gotten himself into the situation where he is the sole arbiter of every dispute that comes up amongst the people. The writer tells us that the people come and make their case before Moses day after day, from morning until night. Moses's father-in-law, Jethro, happens to see this situation and offers him some wisdom. He basically says to Moses, "You must delegate. You are killing yourself." I wonder how many times this is a word we need to hear. Perhaps we too are quick to simply assume all the responsibility for every bake sale, every service project, every yard pickup, every committee at church and at school, and so on and so on. What happens, predictably, is that we burn out. We may even become bitter because of the whole experience and poison the waters when we leave. Jethro's words to Moses should be words we hear when we are in this situation: "What you are doing is not good." That's right. To be the *only one* doing good is *not* good, as strange as that may sound. We are created to live in community, and the sooner we remember to engage others in some of the leadership that is required, the better.

Prayer

Thank you for faithful leaders, Holy One. Thank you for people who go the extra mile, people who keep the candle burning late at night, and those who never tire doing good. Thank you also for times of rest, for the community of the faithful who can lighten the burden for us all. Grant us wisdom in our use of time, and the freedom and faith to delegate to others according to your gracious will. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.